

THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF GRACE AND  
AFRICAN UNDERSTANDING OF SACRIFICE

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## ABSTRACT

This study intends to examine Augustine's view on grace and African understanding of sacrifice. The subject of divine grace of God is one of the major works of Augustine of Hippo. Though much had been said about the grace of God before Augustine but the doctrine of grace came to its fullest exposition in the teaching of Augustine.<sup>1</sup> His view on grace of God was one of his major contributions to the Church.

The methodology adopted for material gathering is library research applying historical approach. Through this study, it is the writer had been able to find that there is a parallel idea between Augustine's view of grace and sacrifice in African Traditional Religion. It is also discovered that there is need to appreciate and appropriate the value of Augustine's work on grace as an impetus for a more African Christian Theology. This is possible by sensitizing contemporary African scholars in particular and Christians as a whole about the importance and application of grace in view of African concept of sacrifice.

This work will lead to increased interest in Augustine's work particularly on the issue of grace and enhance its contextualization. There will also be a more meaningful sense of worship among the Africans and will lead to a better understanding of salvation via faith in God instead of the sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup>Gary S. Shogren, "Grace (New Testament)," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc., 1992), 1088.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The essence of this work is to increase awareness of the Africans that the grace of God covers all areas of life. It is not restricted to a certain group of people, but available to all and it is unmerited. This study is also aimed at establishing the fact that sacrifice in African context is a parallel idea of the divine grace of God in Christian understanding as discussed by St Augustine. This is true in the sense that both the grace of God in Christian context and sacrifice in African context have to do with divine favour, forgiveness and man's well being.

This study had been able to establish that there is need for contemporary African Christian scholars to fill the loopholes caused by the past omission of not understanding sacrifice in African context as a parallel idea of the divine grace of God in Christian context. Also the work had brought to light the need for us as African Christians to appreciate Augustine's work on the grace of God and to correct the adherents of the African Traditional Religion that what they are seeking for through sacrifices had been provided for in Jesus Christ.

In this work, it is affirmed that man can only be saved through grace and not through any merited work. The African Traditional Religionists think that it is through sacrifices that they can gain favour, forgiveness, etc., but it is

only through the grace of God alone. To Augustine, without the grace of God, no man will be able to have any relationship with God whatsoever. This however, calls for positive response through faith on the side of man to the salvific work of Christ effected through the gracious act of God. Faith itself is a product of the gracious act of God toward man. All what God has done, is doing and will do in creation is result of the grace of God. It is also affirmed that sacrifice is what the adherents of African Traditional Religion used to obtain favour, forgiveness, well-being and so on from the Supreme Being (God). this however is human effort to appease gods to obtain whatever man wants from the Supreme Being.

Based on what had been said above, the writer has some recommendations to make for the African Christians. There is need for African Christians to begin to understand the adherents of the African Traditional Religion that sacrifices, offerings, libation, purification etc. are their own ways of obtaining whatever they want from the Supreme Being and that they see all these means as parallel to the grace of God in Christian understanding.

Christians should develop a sympathetic mind for the adherents of African Traditional Religion. They should stop condemning these traditional religionists and begin to correct them in love that what they are looking for through sacrifices had been done for them through Jesus Christ. They should be enlightened that the atoning sacrifice Jesus Christ had made through his body and blood is once and for all and there is no need for any other one. The one Christ has done is perfect, total and complete.

There is also a need for African Christians to begin appropriating the grace of God in African context. This is not to offer any sacrifice, but mediating the redemptive message of Christ in the ways and manners an African man will understand. In presenting the gospel message to a non-Christian African man, emphasis should be laid on the aspect of sacrifice that Christ has made on our behalf. An African man will understand the gospel better and find it more relevant to his context when we approach him with the gospel message from the perspective of sacrifice. Coupled with this is the idea of presenting the gospel with symbols, imageries and illustrations that an African understands and finds relevant to his context.

Lastly, this study has done a comparative study of Augustine's understanding of grace and sacrifice in African Traditional Religion. The grace of God as expatiated by Augustine is unmerited favour of God bringing and reconciling man back to God and sacrifice is what man does to obtain favour, mercy, forgiveness, daily prosperity etc. from the divine. Despite this study, there is still room for more indepth and comprehensive study on the comparative study of Augustine's concept of grace and concept of sacrifice in African understanding.